

To the members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Kellie Choquette. I represent For Cameron, a not for profit 501 (C) 3 organization that advocates for substance use disorder harm reduction, prevention, treatment, and recovery. We also work to reduce the stigma associated with opioid use and addiction. I am a registered voter in Hamden. My husband and I lost our son Nathan to fentanyl overdose in 2018, after seeking effective treatment for him, in vain, for many years. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on HB 5430. I am in support of any legislation which seeks to address the opioid crisis in our state, and am therefore in favor of passing this bill; however, in my opinion, it does not, in my opinion, go far enough to make a meaningful difference.

Fentanyl test strips serve a purpose and save lives, and there is certainly a legitimate reason to make them more widely available given the prevalence of illicit fentanyl in our state. I also agree it is advisable to make methadone more accessible. These measures, however, do not address the root of the opioid problem. In order to properly address the crisis, we need to implement several additional strategies including the following:

1. Currently, there are dozens, if not hundreds of families searching for inpatient treatment toward recovery who cannot find it. We have a devastating shortage of rehab and recovery beds available in this state. This is unacceptable.
2. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse – “research has shown unequivocally that good outcomes are contingent on adequate treatment length. Generally, for residential or outpatient treatment, participation for less than 90 days is of limited effectiveness, and treatment lasting significantly longer is recommended for maintaining positive outcomes...” “...After a course of intensive treatment, the provider should ensure a transition to less intensive continuing care to support and monitor individuals in their ongoing recovery.” Insurance providers currently will fund only up to 21 days of treatment and limited follow on outpatient treatment – This must change.
3. The Navigator pilot program that passed this body last year must be funded and expanded to provide support for those with SUD to gain access to treatment in many cases.
4. Most overdose deaths involving illicitly manufactured fentanyl go uninvestigated. The few that are and that result in an arrest carry a penalty similar to that for the sale of other, less lethal recreational drugs. We’ve proposed an opioid task force to investigate these cases and harsher penalties for knowingly dealing drugs laced with fentanyl.

While I support H.B 5430, I implore the committee to consider the urgency of this public health crisis taking the lives of so many residents of our state. We need to implement bolder measures immediately! Allowing additional time for data collection and research will result in additional deaths. Data collection and research must happen in conjunction with immediate measures to save lives. Please consider taking more meaningful action, including moving this to a special session time if need be. In the time it has taken me to write this testimony, 25 Americans have lost their lives to a fatal overdose. How can we possibly justify looking the other way?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,  
Kellie Choquette